

Web-chat Date: February 8, 2011

Topic: Effective Collaboration for ELT Best Practices

Abstract:

Effective collaboration among teachers and learners can undoubtedly increase the efficiency of the ELT classroom practices. In the competitive world, the skill of teamwork is highly valued. We need to both teach and model this in our classes. However, genuine and effective collaboration among different ELT counterparts can sometimes become a challenge. How can we model effective learners' collaboration in the classrooms and encourage a sense of teamwork among English teaching professionals? In this web-chat, we would like to examine effective methods and philosophical stands to foster operational engagement in collaboration between teachers and teachers, teachers and learners, and learners and learners that can result in the best possible success for EFL learners, especially for those in Asia.

Transcript:

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: The USA is a country famous for people wanting to share their ideas LOUDLY on all topics, and at the university in Chicago, most teachers were very willing to share ideas and materials. That is the culture. But the institutional part was different, at least when it came to actually sharing practices or classrooms. All classes of a skill area (grammar, reading, etc) met at the same time and this made it virtually impossible for teachers in the same skill area to actually observe/share teaching methods/techniques with each other: the timetable simply didn't allow it. So even though there was a culture that fostered the sharing of ideas and materials, the institution really prevented the sharing of practices/classes.

Bill Templer: no term in the literature is "professional learning communities" (PLCs)

Sulaiya: Hi Khun Nina and Mr.Damon,greetings from Ajarn Somporn,Mr.Jude.How's life ?

Bill Templer: William I went to same university it is the 'institutional culture' that prevents cooperative development

Damon Anderson: Hi Khun Jude. Welcome to today's chat. Are you engaged in any team teaching there?

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: :). And it's not unique to any particular university. We teachers there would have loved to share more than just ideas and materials, but it was hard given the uniform time table.

Sulaiya: I'm using another channel/address of my colleague for mine is not possible.Anyway,I will do my best kap.

Bill Templer: the 'institutional culture' of education as organized often prevents real reform in many places from Texas to Thailand

Phanisara: But maybe different "institutions" are different? Depending on how open-minded the leaders are.

Damon Anderson: Yes, Khun Nina. I agree. This is where leadership training for Deans and Heads of Departments would help.

Bill Templer: I don't believe time tables are the real constraint that is often an excuse at U of Chicago, many academics spend their free time researching instead of co-developing by exchange with one another

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: I'm curious about ideas people have on how to start effective collaboration and also professional learning communities (PLC). What are some good baby steps that we can take that will foster trust, and will also build confidence (by minimizing the costs and maximizing the benefits) in the early stages of developing collaboration and PLC.

Sulaiya: Hi, Mr. Damon, actually...we do our individual teaching, but very often we do need to consult just in case...

Bill Templer: but in high schools, it is clear time tables and time constraints are a good excuse not to get together

Shei 2: Hello Everyone. This is quite a discussion.

ubon sanpatchayapong: Bye all. I have to meet my student in a few minutes. Will see you all next time. thanks for all interesting ideas and thought-provoking reaction.

Damon Anderson: Khun Shea, you are currently engaged in a team teaching course with another teacher for the DLF project. What insights can you share?

Ni Phyo San: bye ubon, it's good to know you.

Bill Templer: Julian Edge has a good book COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT that will give you ideas about creating PLCs you can find that book in used copies around

Damon Anderson: Thank you for joining us, Ajarn Ubon!

Phanisara: Have a great class, Aj. Ubon. Please join us next time.

Bill Templer: I tried to get teachers into that book and its ideas both in Thailand and in Malaysia

Damon Anderson: Bill, I have some other great books on Cooperative and Collaborative teaching from ASCD. They are still in boxes from our move, but I will post the titles for everyone later.

Phanisara: I like William's question regarding baby steps for developing trust and collaboration.

Sulaiya: A class of 40 persons would be great fun for effective collaboration indeed, any ideas?

Bill Templer: What we are doing now is good talk in cyberspace. But to do this with colleagues is hard. In Malaysia virtually impossible. Many teachers in Malaysia will confirm that.

Ni Phyo San: yes, please, Damon.

Thu Zar Thwin: Dear Damon, it's quite an interesting and interactive discussion. I'll share this web-chat experience with our teachers in Burma and encourage them to participate in online discussions with all of you in future. Thank you very much for sharing all of your knowledge and experience here.

Bill Templer: I think collaborative learning among students not so hard to organize. Many ideas around.

Shei 2: From my experience in the U.S., the collaboration with teachers at Northeastern, for instance, was more advocated so as to create a community and maintain a similar curriculum. We had meetings that were more productive than I expected. The purpose was to make a stronger English learning environment for international students. However, here in Thailand, and particularly at Thammasat, it is quite the opposite. Teachers tend to be on their own.

Bill Templer: Sulaiya, you can google collaborative and cooperative learning and find a lot of stuff. It is also central to constructivist pedagogy.

Phanisara: K. Bill, even "talk" on cyberspace is a great form of teachers collaboration and sharing. A venue to open up.

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: Maybe one start is to ask teachers at a meeting 1) to present one idea about a method that's worked for them, 2) to share the actual materials they've used in a real class, and 3) to provide a Self-Assessment Rubric so other teachers can see what things, in the opinion of the advocating teacher, are crucial in using that teaching method. This lets teachers share but doesn't actually allow outsiders to come into their classrooms to "spy" on them.

Shei 2: I was observed once in my past two years and have had meetings among ajarns who seem to be only foreigners.

Bill Templer: Linda Christensen's books (from U.S.) full of ideas on students collaborating and student-run learning.

Shei 2: That's a great idea, K. William.

Shei 2: But what of universities in which the faculty is more or less disengaged from one another?

Sulaiya: Our students nowadays they are very smart in IT, and they can help their teachers a lot. That's can be an effective collaboration.

Shei 2: If we teach our students to collaborate as a class, why can't we teach ourselves to do it with each other?

Htay Htay Lwin: Dear Mr. Anderson, I was late to join and I am trying to catch up.

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: Shei, that's an interesting point. At DePaul University in Chicago we had a very effective decade-long history of collaboration on curriculum and standards. And the past 2 years we started collaborating on creating short videos of students' speaking (my project) and writing (the project of another teacher) to help us with norming and with calibrating placement. But we never really tried anything formal to use collaboration with respect to teaching materials or teaching methods. That was done but always informally and usually just one-on-one.

Phanisara 2: Teachers can model active listening in their teaching that students realize the importance of collaborative problem solving skills.

Ni Phyo San: William, your steps are interesting. Does not a teacher allow the other teacher to observe his or her class there?

Damon Anderson: Welcome Htay Htay.

Damon Anderson: Sorry everyone for the flurry of entries at one time. We had another hiccup with the server.

Phanisara 2: I like your idea, Aj. Sulaiya. For teachers to be opened to let students help them.

Bill Templer: Two teachers can agree to observe each other if they feel safe and interactive enough. This is a good beginning.

Shei 2: Self reflection should be practiced more and advocated in a more formal fashion. Teacher evaluations done by students is the usual method but what of teachers on teachers? I often share my ideas when I am teaching the same course. Generally, it's the course coordinator that enforces the collaboration, albeit a loose one

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: Shei, maybe one reason teachers are disengaged is that there are no meetings to encourage sharing. Other reason could be that they are overworked and have too little free time. With respect to the 2nd, I've tried to make the point that collaboration can be a time SAVER. Instead of teachers constantly having to reinvent the wheel, they can share, adapt, change materials with each other. To that end, when I've advocated specific methods I've made sure to supply the materials and the Self-Assessment Rubric to make it easier for (busy) teachers to try out something new.

Bill Templer: Try to find a colleague or maybe a teacher at another school or university nearby

Shei 2: I do have many colleagues that I speak with and share ideas with here but doing so in a larger level is what I want to achieve

Damon Anderson: One thing I have found about starting a professional community is that teachers must see value in the community.

Shei 2: It's very true, William, that the time is a significant, if not the number one factor

Shei 2: Yes!

Bill Templer: I think starting with one other teacher is a good step groups are always intimidating for some especially among teachers who have taught at the same place for some years

Shei 2: I agree K. Damon... the value in the community is important.

Damon Anderson: One example that I have often quoted is one where a successful teacher who had been teaching for 20 years felt that she would gain nothing from such a community. However, after attending, she realized so many things she had done wrong and other things she could do better.

Bill Templer: community is even two people Julian Edge does a lot with that notion

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: Shei, I think a voluntary sharing of evaluations/ideas among teachers is a good idea, but if this is suddenly presented as a new requirement, teachers will probably (strongly) resist. Receiving negative or harsh reviews from ones colleagues could be a way to end collaboration and further disengage teachers. In fact, this can sometimes be a method used by managment who want to discourage teacher collaboration and solidarity. That's why I'm going to emphasize that these are SELF-Assessment Rubrics and are not going to be used to rate other teachers.

Shei 2: Yes, and I often find that teaching at a place for some years gives a sense of (intimidating) authority and superiority over others who may benefit from the experience.

Phanisara 2: "See value" that each can contribute in someways.

Damon Anderson: This has been a great discussion. We are down to our lost few minutes. We need to think about our next topic. Any suggestions?

Bill Templer: anyhow, the smallest collaborative dynamics involve two people best face to face but maybe even via cyberspace

Shei 2: I agree with that aspect, William. It may deter teachers if it's a requirement

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: I might like to mention this roundtable, Damon, as a similar story. I've been teaching 20 years (like the teacher you mentioned) and really didn't think these roundtables would be useful. But i tried the first one and have found them very valuable.

Shei 2: In the same vein as collaboration, how about fostering communicative competency among students via critical issues?

Shei 2: students working together toward a goal and owning responsibility for their learning

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: And I keep coming back for more! Even today rushing back from buying books in Ho Chi Minh City so I could particiapate with all of you!!

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: An idea for the next meeting: "Effective language teaching and learning involves many of the same skills crucial for effective teaching/learning in any discipline".

Shei 2: I was about to sign leave my office when I remembered the roundtable. I feel lucky to have caught a few minutes

Shei 2: Thank you so much

Phanisara: That's a really great comment William. Roundtable discussion, even via cyber space, can be very useful.

Damon Anderson 2: Yes, Thank you William. These chats have begun to foster a kind of community.

Shei 2: we could share some lessons/idea via pdfs?

Shei 2: is that possible

Damon Anderson 2: Yes, Khun Shei. It is possible for me to put up ppts, but I need them in advance.

Phanisara: Interesting thought/topic, William!

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: I'm trying to find ways to help the Modern Language Department become a real leader, innovator, guiding light in education at Tra Vinh University. When other subjects often focus on the "teaching", I think we language teachers nowadays often focus on the "learning". And other fields need to do the same.

Bill Templer: my experience consistently is that I talk better with colleagues in cyberspace than those I work with day in day out which is too bad

Phanisara: So glad to have K. Shei with us :)

Shei 2: Thank you Khun Nina!

Shei 2: These talks stimulate and encourage reflection in itself

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: These cyber chats force us to be concise and to read and carefully respond to others. Things that are hard in real oral meetings.

Phanisara: I agree William. If other fields think and do effectively. It would only help with our English discipline.

Shei 2: Focusing on teaching as an act in itself is a good idea

Shei 2: I usually have my students teach each other and then assess their learning as teachers

Damon Anderson 2: Everyone, we have two minutes left. Any ideas for a topic for our next chat?

Phanisara: You can apply your strength where it is needed the most, K. Bill. We appreciate your participation and great input.

Bill Templer: maybe 'student cooperative learning' could be a topic it meshes with today's focus

Shei 2: yes, I agree with Bill

Shei 2: I think it would be great if we could send a lesson or two or some ideas to play off of and 'share'

Shei 2: Thank you all so much for an insightful webchat!

Damon Anderson 2: Thank you everyone for today's chat. It was great. We look forward to seeing you all next month when we do our next chat (March 8) at the same time and same URL. Please tell your colleagues and friends.

Shei 2: I look forward to the next one...

Shei 2: I am happy to send any ideas / documents for sharing beforehand as well.

Bill Templer: cooperative learning and constructivist approaches in the classroom that is relevant

Phanisara: That's not a bad idea K. Shei. Actual sharing of the lessons!! This is a wonderful chat. Thank you everyone. Hope you have a great week. And see you next time. THANK YOU.

Shei 2: Have a great day everyone!

Bill Templer: do vizhdane from Bulgaria

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: Thanks to all.

Thu Zar Thwin: Thanks again.

Tint Shwe Sin: Thanks everyone. It good to listen everyone's experiences.
